

Your Teen & Prescription Drugs



41 Anthony Avenue
11 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0011
1-800-499-0027
www.MaineParents.net

Call the Northern New England Poison Center
for information and advice at 1-800-222-1222.



What do Parents need to know?

2009 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey

Much of the material in this publication is from Parents: The Anti Drug http://www.theantidrug.com/drug_info/prescription_drugs.asp

Partnership for Drug-free America, Partnership Attitude Tracking Study [PATS] 2007

1: Prescription for Danger: A Report on the Troubling Trend of Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drug Abuse Among the Nation's Teens, ONDCP, January 2008 -- http://www.theantidrug.com/pdfs/prescription_report.pdf

2: Phillips, DP et al. "A steep increase in domestic fatal medication errors with use of alcohol and/or street drugs." Archives of Internal Medicine. 2008;168(14):1561-1566. from: <http://www.abovetheinfluence.com/facts/drugs-prescription-otc.aspx#>

3: Treatment Episode Data Set [TEDS]. (2006). Substance abuse treatment admissions by primary substance of abuse according to sex, age group, race and ethnicity, 2004. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

4: Treatment Data System, Maine Office of Substance Abuse, SFY 2010

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In Maine,

**20.3% of High School students,
grades 9-12, said they had taken
a prescription drug**

not prescribed for them.



Some teens abuse prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) drugs to get high. This includes pain medications, such as drugs prescribed after surgery; depressants, such as sleeping pills or anti-anxiety drugs; and stimulants, such as drugs prescribed for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). OTC drugs such as cough and cold remedies can also be abused. Prescription drugs are readily available in the medicine cabinets of many homes.

Teens sometimes think that using prescription drugs ordered by a doctor is a "safer" way to get high.

Unfortunately, not many parents talk about prescription or OTC drug use, even though teens report that parental disapproval is a powerful way to keep them away from drugs.

Talk to your teen today about the dangers of abusing prescription and OTC drugs. These are powerful drugs that, when abused, are dangerous.

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Prescription Drugs – Find out *More Do More*

What are the dangers?

There are serious health risks related to abuse of prescription drugs. Many teens report mixing prescription drugs or OTC drugs, and alcohol. Mixing alcohol and medications can be harmful. Drinking alcohol with prescription drugs and/or OTC medications can intensify the sedentary effects of alcohol, leading to injuries or death.

Medications commonly abused are painkillers (like OxyContin® or Vicodin®), **depressants** (such as Valium® or Xanax®) **and stimulants** (such as medications for ADD and ADHD – Ritalin® and Adderall®) These are addictive

and can lead to overdose when taken in excess or mixed with other drugs, such as alcohol.

Teens are also abusing some over-the-counter (OTC) drugs, primarily cough and cold remedies that contain dextromethorphan (DXM), a cough suppressant. Products with DXM include NyQuil®, Coricidin®, and Robitussin®, among others. Teens often have easy access to these products.¹ The abuse of OTC cough and cold remedies can cause blurred vision, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, coma, and even death.

Taking prescription drugs without a prescription, not taking them as directed, or mixing them with alcohol are all unsafe and potentially deadly. A 2008 study of U.S. death certificates for which people died from medication errors showed that there was a 3,196 percent increase between 1983 and 2004 in deaths at home from combining prescription drugs with alcohol and/or street drugs.² Nationally, between 1995 and 2005, treatment admissions for prescription painkillers increased more than 300 percent.³

In Maine, of the 631 admissions for youths under the age of 18, 10.3% (65) of those admissions listed a Prescription Drug as their primary drug leading to admission.⁴

What can I do as a parent?

Monitor quantities and control access of drugs in the home. Take note of how many pills are in a bottle or pill packet, and keep track of refills. Consider placing all medicines in a locked cabinet or box. This goes for your own medication, as well as prescribed medication for your teen and other members of your household. If your teen has been prescribed a drug, be sure you control the medication, and monitor dosages and refills.

Follow doctor's orders and set clear rules about not sharing medicine. Make sure your teen uses prescription drugs only as directed by a medical provider and follows instructions for OTC products carefully. This includes taking the proper dosage and not using with other substances without a medical provider's approval.

Be a good role model. Examine your own behavior to ensure you set a good example. If you misuse your prescription drugs, such as share them with your kids, or abuse them, your teen will take notice. Avoid sharing your drugs and always follow your medical provider's instructions.

Properly conceal and dispose of old or unused medicines. Unused prescription drugs should be disposed of through a take back program or hidden and thrown away in the trash. If you put them in the trash, mix them with an undesirable substance (like used coffee grounds or kitty litter) and put the mixture in an empty can or bag. Unless the directions say otherwise, do NOT flush medications down the drain or toilet because the chemicals can pollute the water supply. Also, remove any personal, identifiable information from prescription bottles or pill packages before you throw them away. For more information about Take Back programs in Maine, visit <http://www.safemeddisposal.com/>

Ask friends and family to safeguard their prescription drugs as well. Make sure your friends and relatives (especially grandparents) also know about the risks and encourage them to regularly monitor their own medicine cabinets. If there are other households your teen has access to, talk to those families about the importance of safeguarding medications. If you don't know the parents of your child's friends, then make an effort to get to know them and get on the same page about rules and expectations for use of all drugs, including alcohol and illicit drugs.

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